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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8269th meeting
Tuesday, 29 May 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Duclos
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Ms. Eckels-Currie

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/484)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/484)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/484, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018).

I give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: I am going to start today with eastern Ghouta, about which the Security Council has had many discussions and we have provided many briefings over the past five months, not least in respect of resolution 2401 (2018). After it regained control of the area, the Government of Syria asked the United Nations to provide assistance to local people. I released $16 million for that from the Syria Humanitarian Fund, for which I am responsible. The United Nations asked for visas for additional staff to work on the problems of the area, some of which were granted. Over the past two months, local, national and international humanitarian organizations have worked in sites in neighbouring areas that are hosting people displaced from eastern Ghouta. We are providing food, water, shelter, medical services and protection.

The collaboration that underpinned that effort must now extend into eastern Ghouta itself, as people there begin to try to rebuild their lives. We are providing assistance through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, but the United Nations itself has received authorization to visit eastern Ghouta only once since mid-March. That was for a visit to Sagba and Kafr Batna on 14 May. During that visit we observed the resumption of some services, with electricity, education and health facilities starting up, for example, and a limited number of businesses and markets reopening, but it was clear that there are huge unmet needs and extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure.

The authorities report that more than 10,000 people have returned to eastern Ghouta from rural Damascus over the past two weeks. That, and the needs of almost 200,000 people believed to have remained throughout the violence, makes access to the area even more critical. The Government has already approved an inter-agency convoy to bring assistance to 70,000 people in Douma as part of the current bi-monthly plan, but that convoy has not gone, because facilitation letters have not been provided. Therefore, I reiterate our request to the Government of Syria to facilitate access to eastern Ghouta, so that needs can be assessed and assistance and protection scaled up.

The humanitarian situation in and around Afrin remains highly complex. The United Nations and others continue to provide assistance, including food, nutrition, shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene and protection services to people displaced from Afrin to Tell Rifaat and elsewhere. Inside Afrin, humanitarian assistance provided from across the border has been critical for many people. Findings from a recent needs assessment tell us that most health facilities in rural areas remain closed, many medical personnel have fled and many schools, markets and bakeries are not functioning. We are still concerned about reports that people are being prevented from leaving areas of displacement in Tell Rifaat, although we hear that some may have been able to return to Afrin in recent days.

Yarmouk camp and surrounding areas in southern Damascus saw fierce fighting in the past month, resulting in the loss of life and the displacement of an estimated 6,000 people — most of them Palestinian refugees. Last week, combatants and civilians began to be evacuated from Yarmouk. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reports that as few as 100 refugees may now remain in the camp. Humanitarian organizations have not been able to access Yarmouk, but UNRWA was allowed to carry out a rapid needs assessment in neighbouring Yalda yesterday. An inter-agency convoy

to the area is now a key priority. I ask the Government to issue facilitation letters for that convoy.

On Rukban, discussions continue on how to deliver aid safely. That long-running issue is still not resolved. Humanitarian agencies are working closely with the Syrian authorities, the United States, the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to get agreement on a convoy.

In Raqqa, the United Nations and its partners continue to provide assistance, including monthly food rations, household items, water trucking, psychosocial support for children and primary health-care services. However, while 135,000 people are now reported to have returned to Raqqa city, safety remains a very serious concern owing to high levels of explosive hazards.

The situation in Idlib is alarming, with air strikes, clashes between armed groups, overcrowding and severely stretched basic services deepening the suffering of both displaced people who have fled to Idlib and host communities. More than 80,000 newly displaced people have arrived in Idlib since March. Keeping pace with the increase in needs in Idlib has involved redirecting resources from other activities.

Many of the recent new arrivals in Idlib have come from northern rural Homs. Some 35,000 people were evacuated from that area earlier this month, after a significant escalation. An inter-agency convoy — the first in more than two months — is due to go to northern rural Homs tomorrow with assistance for nearly 93,000 people, following the receipt of facilitation letters on Sunday

During last week's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (see S/PV.8264), the Secretary-General spoke about medical facilities being routinely attacked and about medical personnel being targeted or prevented from carrying out their duties around the world. Violence against health-care and health personnel remains a grim hallmark of the conflict in Syria. Ninety-two attacks have been documented over the first four months of this year. Those involved 89 deaths and 135 injuries. We are investigating a number of cases of medical facilities being attacked shortly after having been deconflicted. I want to emphasize how concerned I am about that. It is an issue on which I may have to come back to the Council.

I want to say finally a few words about the humanitarian response and the number of people we are helping despite all these problems.

In Syria we are running one of the world's largest humanitarian operations, and it continues to save lives every day. A nationwide immunization awareness campaign took place from 22 to 30 April. Initial results indicate that nearly 325,000 children were vaccinated against measles and 1.3 million children under five years old were vaccinated against polio. United Nations convoys approved by the Government of Syria in those parts of the country under Government control provided food assistance for more than 2 million people last month. Cross-border deliveries, mandated under resolution 2393 (2017), provided food for nearly 850,000 people. We are, incidentally, due to present to the Council the review commissioned in that resolution next month.

There are still more than 2 million people in hard-to-reach areas. Those 2 million people, in places like northern rural Homs, Douma and southern Damascus, are some of the most desperate in the country. Just six inter-agency convoys have reached those areas so far this year, helping 169,000 people. That is less than 20 per cent of the people we would like to be reaching. I again ask for the support of Council members for our efforts to ensure safe, unimpeded and sustained access, so we can help people like those in hard-to-reach areas who are in the greatest need.

The President: I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

There are no names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.20 a.m.